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WOMEN MINISTERS IN 1986 AND 1977: A Ten Year View

A Report by

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Denominations having more than one hundred female clergy, presented in Table 3, below, show varying degrees of success in placing women in responsible positions in local congregations as pastors. Among the mainline denominations the Lutheran Church in America (now merged into the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) had the highest percentage of women heads of pastoral staff of local churches. As for women assigned to work in local congregations generally, the Lutheran Church in America (77%) and The United Methodist Church (71%) had the highest percentage of women clergy serving in this role.

The number and percentage of women clergy serving as chief pastors (heads of pastoral staff) and as other staff of local churches appears to be one important measure of the degree of acceptance of women clergy. It is regarded as a measure of discrimination against women. Women clergy appear to be more easily accepted in church employment outside the local church at various denominational administrative offices, in ecumenical council positions, and in many institutional roles, it is observed.

As a measure of the degree of importance attached to the employment of women clergy in local churches, one can cite a press release from the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ ("Women Clergy Still Experience Discrimination, UCC Survey Finds," Dec. 18, 1986) describing the finding of a study conducted by the UCC's Coordinating Center for Women in Church and Society. The release pointed out that although it was the first Protestant denomination to ordain women and is believed to have been the first to have women account for a majority of students studying for an M. Div. degree, and to have had a higher percentage of women clergy than the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), The United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Lutheran Church in America, it lagged behind these bodies in placing ordained women in the local church.

Table 3, below, shows for denominations with one hundred or more clergy in 1986, those with the highest percentage of women serving in congregations as heads of pastoral staff as well as total number of women serving in congregations (heads of pastoral staff, associate or assistant pastors and in other capacities).

**Table 3: Total Women Clergy,
Number and Percentage of Heads of Pastoral Staff
and of Those Serving in Congregations,
by Denominations with More than 100 Women Clergy, 1986**

Denomination	Total Women Clergy	Heads of Past. Staff	Percent- age	Rank Order	Total in Cong.	Percent- age	Rank Order
American Baptist Churches	429	156	36%	(3)	259	60%	(7)
American Lutheran Church	306	89	29	(5)	237	77	(4)
Assemblies of God	3,718	276	7	(13)	N.A.	N.A.	—
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	743	196	26	(7)	363	49	(9)
Christian Congregation Church of God	290	289	99	(1)	289	99	(1)
(Anderson, Ind.)	275	64	23	(9)	129	47	(10)
Church of the Brethren	120	38	32	(4)	68	57	(8)
Church of the Nazarene	355	36	10	(12)	70	20	(13)
Episcopal Church	796	220	28	(6)	N.A.	N.A.	—
Lutheran Church in America	484	268	55	(2)	375	77	(3)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	1,519	389	26	(8)	923	61	(6)
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints	860	21	2	(14)	849	98	(2)
Salvation Army	3,220	568	18	(11)	1,161	36	(11)
United Church of Christ**	1,460	277	19	(10)	486	33	(12)
United Methodist Church	1,891	N.A.	N.A.	(—)	1,344	71	(5)

**Estimated from "Women Clergy Still Experiencing Discrimination, UCC Survey Finds," Office of Communication, United Church of Christ, Dec. 18, 1986.

Women Clergy in Canada

Owing to the structure of religion in Canada, with membership concentrated in three major denominations, the Roman Catholic Church, The United Church of Canada and The Anglican Church of Canada, it is not surprising that the heavy concentration of women clergy is found in the latter two bodies which ordain women to the full ministry.

In Canada, those bodies not ordaining women, including most particularly the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, are in a majority in terms of membership but not in terms of number of denominations represented. It is estimated that 29 denominations in Canada ordain women to the full ministry, 31 do not, and uncertainty exists about 16 denominations. Four denominations do not have clergy.

Of the 908 women clergy reported for Canada in Table 4, below, the greater majority were found in The United Church of Canada which had 441, and The Anglican Church of Canada, which had 212, making a total of 653. When the 86 women clergy of the Presbyterian Church of Canada are added, the total reaches 739, 81% of the total of 908 Women Clergy. The data are not complete because a number of small denominations believed to ordain women did not report. Those bodies reporting ordained women, however, contain the overwhelming proportion of women ordained to the full ministry.

Among some of the larger Canadian bodies, those with 40 or more female clergy, only two had a higher percentage of women clergy than the average for all groups ordaining women to the full ministry which was 7.3%. These were The United Church of Canada (11.3%) and the Presbyterian Church in Canada (7.8%). In terms of the percentage of women serving as chief pastors in local churches, the Presbyterian Church in Canada had 57% and The United Church of Canada, 54%. Looking at data concerning the percentage of women serving in local congregations (chief pastors, associate and assistant pastors, and those serving in other roles), The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints had 93% of its clergy working in the local church, the Presbyterian Church in Canada 75% and The United Church of Canada 71%. There were no data on the job assignments of the 212 women priests reported by the Anglican Church of Canada.

Women Clergy in the United States and Canada

Previous surveys on the ordination of women to the full ministry and the current one show a slow, but steady, increase of women. There is every reason to believe that the percentage of women ordained will continue to increase in the years ahead as women gain wider acceptance in the various denominations based on demonstrated performance and on the changing attitudes of those currently opposing equal roles for women.

Data from the *Fact Book on Theological Education* for the academic year 1987-1988 published by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada indicate that women enrolled in ordination programs at seminary (M. Div. and D. Min. in-sequence) have increased from 2,905 (11.5% of total enrollment) in 1976 to 6,108 in 1987 (22.4%), an increase of 110%. There is, consequently, an increase in the potential number of women who will aspire to work as clergy ordained to the full ministry in various denominations.

The number of denominations ordaining women to the full ministry has not shown a significant increase since the 1977 survey. At that time, it was estimated that 87 denominations in the United States did not ordain women and 76 did. The estimates for the U.S. based on this current survey data for 221 bodies is that 84 denominations ordain women and 82 do not. There was uncertainty about 49 denominations and 6 did not have clergy. For Canada, the 80 denominations surveyed indicated that 29 ordained women, 31 did not, and there was uncertainty about 16. Those not having clergy numbered 4.

Table 4: Women Clergy in Canada, 1986:
Percentage and Functional Categories by Denomination

Denomination	Total Clergy	Total Female Clergy	% Female Clergy	Year Auth. Ordng. Women	Number Women Heads Past. Staff	Assoc./ Ass't Pastor	Serving in Other Role	Number Serving side Cong.	Retired
Anglican Church of Canada	3,180	212	6.7%	1976	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Bible Holiness Movement	10	2	20.0	1949	0	0	0	2	0
Canadian Baptist Federation*	(1,091)	(26)	(2.3)	—	(6)	(8)	(3)	(5)	(3)
Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec	542	14	2.6	1949	5	3	1	5	0
Baptist Union of Western Canada**	228	5	2.2	1959	0	3	0	0	1
Union of French Baptist Churches in Canada				Do Not Ordain Women					
United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces	321	7	2.2	1954	1	2	2	0	2
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada	49	1	2.2	1888	1	0	0	0	0
Church of the Nazarene	277	10	4.4	1908	0	0	0	0	10
Conference of Mennonites in Canada	452	8	1.8	1951	1	4	0	2	1
Congregational Christian Churches in Ontario***	12	2	16.7	1966	2	0	0	0	0
Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church	13	2	15.4	1984	2	0	0	0	0
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada	744	33	4.4	1986	13	5	0	7	8
Foursquare Gospel Church of Canada	92	11	12.0	N.A.	0	6	1	4	0
Free Methodist Church of Canada	214	8	3.7	1890	2	3	2	0	1
Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	6	1	16.7	1960	1	0	0	0	0
Mennonite Church (Canada)	156	12	7.7	1979	7	4	0	1	0
Moravian Church in America, Northern Province, Canadian District	13	2	15.4	1975	2	0	0	0	0
Presbyterian Church in Canada	1,102	86	7.8	1968	49	14	2	11	10
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints									
United Church of Canada	1,058	44	4.2	1984	2	12	27	3	0
Wesleyan Church	3,891	441	11.3	1936	239	74	0	35	93
	183	7	3.8	19th C.	1	1	0	4	0
Total	12,493	908	7.3		328	131	35	74	126

* Figures in parentheses are totals for the indented bodies that follow and are not an additional entry.

** One women minister serving outside ministry

*** Do not ordain but grant credentials and ministerial standing to women

**** Eight women clergy without a call.

Varying Views on the Ordination of Women

Denominations in the U.S. and Canada seem evenly divided on the subject of ordination of women. Among those not ordaining are the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and "Old Catholics" as well as many fundamentalist and conservative Protestant denominations. On the other hand, the Episcopal Church and Anglican Church of Canada and many moderate and liberal Protestant denominations do authorize the ordination of women to the full ministry. In Islam, women do not function as clergy and within the Jewish community women have been ordained to the rabbinate in the Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist branches but not in the Orthodox. Data found in table 5 following is obtained from that appearing in "Insight," a section of *The Washington Times* (April 6, 1987):

Table 5: Number of Women Ordained to the Rabbinate

Branch	Members (In Millions)	Total Rabbis	Women Rabbis	% Women Rabbis
Reformed	1.3	1,450	101	7.0%
Reconstructionist	.04	110	27	24.5
Conservative	1.2	1,000	4	0.4
Orthodox	1.5	850	0	—
Total	4.04	3,410	132	3.9

The differences of opinion over ordination of women finds supporters for ordination in those bodies not ordaining and opposition to the ordination of women from within some of the denominations now ordaining women. The dividing line on ordaining women cuts through many denominational families. For example, among Lutherans the newly-formed Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ordains women while the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod do not. Similar polarity can be found in the Baptist, Mennonite, Methodist, Presbyterian and Reformed families.

Support for, and opposition to, ordination of women comes from various interpretations of the meaning of the New Testament, the role of canon law, theology and tradition in the church.

Fundamentalist and conservative Protestant denominations most often base refusal to ordain women to the full ministry on various scriptural passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 37: "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a women to speak in church . . . If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord." (RSV) Also 1 Timothy 2:11-12: "Let a women learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men, she is to keep silent." (RSV) Although many other biblical restrictions were cited by respondents to the questionnaire, Mark 3:13-19 was also deemed of special importance. This passage refers to the calling of the twelve apostles by Jesus: "And he went up into the hills, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and to have authority to cast out demons . . ." (RSV) There follows a listing of the apostles, all of whom were male.

In addition to the various biblical passages cited in the questionnaires, other reasons for not ordaining women were given as follows: "no placement opportunities," "to avoid division and conflict," and it is not authorized by Scripture.

Among Roman Catholic, Orthodox and "Old Catholic" groups, the maintenance of an all-male clergy comes from appeals to the canon law of the church which apparently is regarded as immutable, to the "tradition of the Church," and to the argument that "a priest is called by virtue of his ordination, to present the image of Christ. Christ in His Incarnation was born into the flesh of a male."

In April 1975, according to the 1976 *Catholic Almanac* (p. 73), Pope Paul declared in an address to a committee studying the Church's response to the 1975 UN-Sponsored International Women's Year that: "The Church cannot ordain women to the priesthood because Christ's call to them—to be 'disciples and collaborators,' but not ordained ministers—cannot be changed."

Those favoring the ordination of women to the full ministry provide their own sources of authority. First of all, there is the manner in which Biblical truth is understood. Bible passages must be understood and interpreted in a contemporary context. What was written 2,000 years ago in a totally different cultural, theological and social context requires interpretation in order for it to be rightly understood and applied in this day and age.

There is a considerable body of biblical research that supports women in ministry and challenges the interpretation of those citing 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12, texts quoted above, as the chief injunctions against women exercising preaching, teaching and leadership ministries in the church.

One such source is "A Biblical Basis for Equal Partnership: Women and Men in the Ministry of the Church," by the Rev. Dr. David M. Scholer, Dean of the Seminary and Professor of New Testament, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Lombard, Ill. (Women in Ministry. The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board of American Baptist Churches, 475 Riverside Dr., Rm 1700, New York, NY 10115, 1986).

Scholer states that: "1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is one of the two texts from the New Testament often used as a major argument against preaching, teaching and leadership ministries for women in the church. . . It should be recalled that Paul has already indicated in this letter—1 Corinthians—that women did participate in prayer and prophecy with authority in the church (1 Corinthians 11:5, 10; 14:3-5). This fact alone shows that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 cannot be a general, absolute and timeless prohibition on women speaking in church."

Turning to 1 Timothy 2:11-12, which is often cited by opponents of women participating in the church as preachers, teachers and leaders, Scholer states that: "Two broad and basic issues of responsible biblical interpretation should concern us in this, indeed in any, issue—balance and consistency. In terms of balance it is the total witness of Scripture which must inform our thought and action. In terms of consistency it is crucial to approach our understanding of all biblical texts in the same way in order to offset as much as possible our blind spots and biases." Scholer then goes on to ask "Why is it that so many persons insist that 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is a transcultural, absolutely normative text, but at the same time do not approach other texts in 1 Timothy with the same passion? Pressed in the same way 1 Timothy 3:2 would rule out all single men from ministry, and 1 Timothy 5:3-16 would require churches to establish 'orders of widows' for those sixty and older and would require that all widows fifty-nine and under remarry and that for the reason of their sensual desires and idleness. . . In conclusion, it is my deepest conviction that the full evidence of Scripture and an understanding of balance and consistency in interpretation mean that we must rethink some of our traditions and reaffirm with clarity and conviction the biblical bases for the full participation of women in the ministries of the church."

One biblical passage pointed to as favorable to the ordination of women is Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (RSV) As is pointed out in *Women of the Cloth* (p. 10) by Jackson Carroll, Barbara Hargrove and Adair T. Lummis (Harper & Row, 1981), the above line from Galatians is illustrative of the "strong strain within the Christian ethic itself that challenges and relativizes ascribed distinctions (that is, distinctions defined by a person's birth) including gender. . . This emphasis on freedom from bondage to tradition, including the tradition of inferiority of women, that oppresses individuals or groups is a strong one in the Christian ethic, and it provides the basis for challenge to the 'sacred' masculinity of the ordained ministry."

Also from *Women of the Cloth* (p. 10) a sociological perspective on the ordination of women is offered which asserts that "modern . . . professionalism . . . stresses norms and achievement rather than ascription. Thus, in principle, the capacity to perform well in a program—an achievement norm—has superseded distinctions based on ascribed characteristics such as sex or social class. Therefore, for both theological and social reasons, a strong case can be made—and has been in those denominations that ordain women—that gender is not a determining criterion of the status or ordained ministry. Ministry is not an exclusively male status. There is nothing sacred about masculinity when it comes to ordained ministry. To make sex a criterion for entry into the profession is not only irrelevant and misguided, it is also inherently wrong."

Another argument advanced in support of ordaining women, especially among the Protestant bodies ordaining women, is that Christians are baptized into the *priesthood of all believers*. They are baptized into full union in the church. Ministry performed by an ordained person is an outward and visible sign of the priesthood held by the entire Christian community.

Another assertion made by those ordaining women to the full ministry, is that the sex of Jesus is

irrelevant. If only males can be ordained because Jesus was a male, then only Jews should be ordained because Jesus was a Jew.

Acceptance of Women Clergy in Local Churches

Various studies made by mainline denominations ordaining women including the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church, and the American Baptist Churches confirm that there is much resistance to the ordination of women to the full ministry, that there is discrimination in salary between equally trained male and female clergy, that "women clergy still occupy lesser positions in terms of leadership of large churches with the tendency toward women occupying positions in the smaller churches or in multiple small churches."

In the study "Women Priests in the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A." (Women in Ministry, Episcopal Church Center, 815 Second Ave., New York, NY 10017) it is stated (p. 4): "From the deployment figures . . . it is apparent that women are less likely to be employed as rectors of parishes: Only 14% of ordained women were rectors or vicars at the end of 1985. By contrast, many churches are increasingly hiring women as assistants or curates. Forty-five percent of ordained women were functioning as assistants/associates at the end of 1985." It was also pointed out that women have only been officially admitted to Holy Orders for eight years and this may account for the low percentage of rectors or vicars. Another trend of interest is that "At the current rate of growth the numbers of women clergy is doubling every three years and it is expected that parity will be achieved by 1994." (p. 4)

A survey conducted by the United Church of Christ, cited above, says that: "Women Ministers still have a long way to go if United Church of Christ clergywomen are typical. Of 138 women ministers participating in a recent survey, 61% said they have been turned down for jobs because of their gender." Of the 1,460 ordained women in 1986, only about one-third serve in local churches and of these, 209 (some 43%) are in associate, assistant or Christian education positions, and many of the rest are pastors of small, rural churches. "Senior pastorates and sole pastorates in larger parishes continue to elude women." The study also revealed that 43% of women clergy "reported sexual harassment on the job, either by colleagues or parishioners, and 63% said they have been denied decision-making roles in the church because of their gender. About 72% said that they are paid less than men, a statistic reinforced by the denomination's pension Boards, which have found that women parish ministers are paid 75% of what men are paid."

Although women have not yet overcome all impediments to full acceptance in ordained ministry, women have, from the very inception of the Christian church, exercised varied and faithful ministries which have continually expanded over the centuries. Currently, the increasing role of women specifically in the ordained full ministry has been documented by various studies, including the present one. In the United States and Canada, ordained women have been placed in congregational employment most easily when they have the active and enthusiastic support of local and regional church officials. There has been an increasing acceptance of women clergy in local church situations especially by younger people and by those of higher educational attainment. Women have also gained acceptance as pastors once they have been given the opportunity to demonstrate their competence in preaching and in pastoral care at the local level.

However, much remains to be done to overcome sexist attitudes on the part of some in local churches. There is a continuing need to change cultural values and assumptions and to promote organizational change at all levels of church life if women are to achieve full equality in employment in the churches.

Summary

Women Ministers in 1986 and 1977: A Ten Year View presents data on women clergy ordained to the full ministry derived from questionnaires sent to over 300 religious bodies in the United States and Canada by the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*. It also incorporates current information from some other surveys made by various denominations and agencies. Its overall purpose is to provide a quantitative overview of the position of clergywomen in various denominations in the U.S. and Canada and to see this in the perspective of patterns of growth. Below is a summary of the major points made by the report:

- It is estimated that there has been a doubling of the number of ordained women ministers in the United States in those bodies ordaining women to the full ministry. Over the period 1977-1986,

the number rose from 10,470 (4.0%) of ordained members to 20,730 (7.9%). For Canada, which was surveyed only in 1986, 908 female clergy were recorded out of a total of 12,493 clergy (7.3%). Although the data for Canada are not complete, the greater majority of it is reported.

- Over the ten-year period 1977-1986, the bulk of the increase in women clergy in the U.S. has been accounted for by the Assemblies of God and ten denominations related to the National Council of Churches.

- Among the denominations having more than 100 women clergy there are varying degrees of success in placing women in responsible positions as pastors and other fully ordained clergy in local churches. The Lutheran Church in America (now merged into the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) had the highest percentage of women serving as pastors and in other clerical roles, 77%, followed by The United Methodist Church, 71%, of the mainline denominations reporting.

- The number and percentage of women clergy serving as chief pastors and as staff of local churches appears to be one important measure of discrimination against women in those denominations ordaining women to the full ministry.

- The structure of Canadian religion concentrates membership in three denominations, The Roman Catholic Church, The United Church of Canada, and The Anglican Church of Canada. The latter two ordain women and together they account for 72% of the 908 women clergy. When the Presbyterian Church in Canada is added, the percentage reaches 81%.

- In terms of percentage of women clergy serving as chief pastors of local churches, the Presbyterian Church in Canada had 57% and The United Church, 54%. Looking at the data on the percentage of clergy serving in congregations as pastors, associate and assistant pastors and in other roles, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints had 93%, the Presbyterian Church in Canada 75% and The United Church of Canada 71%.

- The number of denominations in the United States ordaining women to the full ministry has not shown a large increase over the period 1977-1986. In 1977 it was estimated that 87 denominations did not ordain and 76 did; the current survey estimated that 84 denominations ordain women and 82 do not. For Canada, the number ordaining is estimated to be 29 and those not ordaining, 31. In both countries there is a group of smaller bodies about which there is no information.

- Denominations are divided over ordaining women. Those not ordaining women are the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and "Old Catholic" bodies as well as many fundamentalist and conservative groups. Bodies ordaining women include The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada and many moderate and liberal Protestant denominations. In Islam, women do not function as clergy and within the Jewish community the Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist branches, but not the Orthodox, ordain women.

- Opposition to the ordination of women is based upon scriptural passages, especially 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 37; 1 Timothy 2:11-12; and Mark 3: 13-19. Reasons such as avoiding conflict, male image of Christ in priesthood, canon law, and the tradition of the church are also used.

- Those favoring the ordination of women appeal to scripture such as Galatians 3:28, to the necessity to interpret scripture in a relevant contemporary framework, to sociological arguments challenging ascribed status, the idea that achievement norms have superseded distinctions based on ascription, and to the concept of the priesthood of all believers.

- Various studies made by mainline denominations confirm that there is discrimination in salary between equally trained male and female clergy, that women clergy still occupy lesser positions, that sexist attitudes exist in all religious bodies.

- Women have from the very inception of the Christian church exercised varied and faithful ministries which have continually expanded over the centuries. Currently the increasing role of women, specifically in the ordained, full ministry has been documented by various studies and will no doubt continue in future years.

- The challenge in the years ahead is to change the attitudes of church officials and the laity by working for a revision of individual values, cultural assumptions and practices thereby bringing about organizational change within the churches.

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